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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAMA 000553

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ETRD](#) [KDEM](#) [PTER](#) [ASEC](#) [OVIP](#) [BA](#)

SUBJECT: SCENESSETTER FOR CROWN PRINCE SALMAN'S APRIL 19-22  
VISIT TO WASHINGTON

REF: MANAMA 544 (NOTAL)

Classified by Ambassador William T. Monroe for reasons 1.4  
(b) and (d).

1. (C) The primary reason for the Crown Prince's April 19-22 visit to Washington is to advocate for expeditious Congressional ratification of the U.S.-Bahrain Free Trade Agreement (FTA). With the launch of U.S. FTA negotiations with the United Arab Emirates and Oman, Bahrain knows it has a limited window of opportunity as the only Gulf country with an FTA, and it wants to maximize this period by a rapid ratification. The Crown Prince understands the realities of the order of business in Congress, but may ask that the Administration consider exploring possible options for pushing the Bahrain FTA to the front of the queue to promote more expeditious ratification. We should confirm with him that Bahrain has not been intimidated by public Saudi (and now EU) opposition to the agreement in late 2004 and early 2005. He will likely applaud continued U.S. engagement with Saudi Arabia on WTO accession to ensure that the Saudis do not once again direct their ire at Bahrain.

2. (C) The GOB is wrestling with an increasingly assertive Shia opposition and fearful Sunni community on the defensive. Per reftel, the CP told the Ambassador he wants to create an environment that is supportive to all sectors of society and avoid sectarianism. He will seek reaffirmation that the United States supports Bahrain's political reform process, as the President and Secretary have mentioned in several high-profile speeches, including the State of the Union address. While assuring him that Bahrain is on the right long-term path, we should urge that Bahrain, as it deals with sectarian pressures, pursue policies consistent with its commitment to democratization and freedom of expression. We are well-positioned to support Bahrain in this process through our MEPI programming. Bahrain is demonstrating leadership in reform by taking an active role in projects of the G-8/Broader Middle East and North Africa (BMENA) initiative. It will host the November 2005 Forum for the Future conference which, in the GOB's view, should focus on achievements in realizing the vision defined at the 2004 conference in Morocco. Bahrain will formally showcase its role in establishing the Bahrain Center for Entrepreneurial Excellence and the Network of Funds.

3. (S) Cooperation on counterterrorism has improved since last summer's concern about the release of six terror suspects, but it will be important to underscore to the Crown Prince the importance we attach to continuing to build on this cooperation. On the positive side, the Bahrain National Security Agency (BNSA) has shown a new willingness to enter into joint activities to help monitor and track suspected terrorists. The Crown Prince played a role in moving recently returned former Bahrain Ambassador to the U.S. Shaykh Khalifa into the Deputy position at BNSA, and attributes the improved cooperation with BNSA to this appointment. Also on the positive side, influential Minister of Interior Shaykh Rashid has sought a larger role on CT issues, most notably through his advocacy of a Joint Counter Terrorism Center, which is being established with U.S. assistance. At the same time, the recent terrorist attack in Doha highlighted the continuing threat in all of the GCC countries, including Bahrain. And we remain concerned that last summer's terror suspects, currently released (under surveillance) as their court cases proceed, may in the end not be successfully prosecuted. We need to reemphasize to the CP our hope that they will be prosecuted, but that regardless of the outcome of their cases, these and other terror suspects must remain under tight surveillance.

4. (C) The Crown Prince has been the greatest champion within the Bahraini leadership for support for DOD-operated Bahrain School, which continues to operate successfully despite the withdrawal of Navy dependents last summer. The Crown Prince is an alumnus and his children currently attend the school (as do the children of many other prominent Bahrainis). He describes the school as an important ambassador for the U.S. to Bahrain's people and society. He was instrumental in quickly executing the GOB's \$2 million payment as its contribution to close the gap on the school's operating expenses for the 2004-05 academic year. He will thank the Administration for its support for the school, pledge to coordinate closely with us to ensure the school's long-term viability and high standards, and hope for

continued DOD commitment beyond the next school year.

15. (C) The Crown Prince represented Bahrain at last month's Arab Summit in Algiers. He will be interested in Administration views and insights on latest developments/prospects on Israel-Palestine, Lebanon/Syria, Iraq and Iran. Iran remains a critical concern in Bahrain, all the more as there have been allegations of Iranian ties to Shia activists, most notably during Ashura processions in February.

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Objectives  
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16. (C) What we want from the visit:

-- Renewed commitment from the Crown Prince on Bahraini ratification and implementation of the FTA.

-- Understanding on the CP's part of the importance we attach to Bahrain's continuing commitment to democratization and freedom of expression as it deals with the sectarian pressures it faces.

-- Commitment from the Crown Prince to continued and enhanced counter-terrorism cooperation, as well as continued tight surveillance of domestic extremists and vigorous prosecution of the four terrorism suspects to send the right message on combating terrorism.

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Issues of Interest to Bahrain  
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17. (C) The Crown Prince will want to hear from his interlocutors on:

-- The Administration's commitment to move expeditiously to seek Congressional ratification of the FTA.

-- Continued support for Bahrain's reform program, including its hosting of the November 2005 Forum for the Future.

-- Support and assistance for Bahrain's counter-terrorism efforts.

-- Commitment to maintaining the Bahrain School as a DOD institution.

-- Latest USG insights on Israel/Palestine, Syria/Lebanon, Iraq, and Iran.

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Key Issues to Raise  
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17. (S) We suggest Washington officials raise the following key points:

-- Thank Bahrain for its close friendship and support in the region, including its support for the U.S. Navy (NAVCENT headquarters), its decision to send a brigade to Afghanistan, and its positive public support of Iraq and the new government there.

-- Recognize the importance that Bahrain attaches to rapid ratification of the FTA, indicate we share this desire, and pledge to continue to work with Congress for expeditious ratification.

-- Reaffirm our support and praise for Bahrain's democratization efforts and leadership in the BMENA initiative (including the Forum for the Future), while underscoring the importance we attach to Bahrain's continuing commitment to democratization and freedom of expression as it deals with the sectarian pressures it faces.

-- Stress our continuing concern on counterterrorism, in Bahrain and the region, and our commitment to work closely with the GOB -- both with the BNSA and with the Ministry of Interior on the JCTC. Noting that everything we want to do in Bahrain, from military cooperation to FTA, depends on close cooperation in this area, stress that strong action against terrorists like the four suspects sends the right signal to Al Qaida and the world that Bahrain will not tolerate any connection to terrorism on its soil. Urge continued tight surveillance of terror suspects.

-- Pledge to work with the GOB on the future of the Bahrain School.  
MONROE